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Council backs Fontana's decision to stay put

Mayor Joe Fontana discusses council business on Tuesday at city hall before excusing himself for a vote on a motion asking him to take a leave of absence while fighting criminal charges. The motion was defeated by a council vote of 8-5. DAVE CHIDLEY/THE CANADIAN PRESS

Motion dies. City hall gallery full as politicians discuss call for mayor to take leave

ANGELA MULLINS
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A motion asking Mayor Joe Fontana to leave his post while fighting criminal charges failed on Tuesday in a vote of 8-5.

Fontana cited a conflict of interest, giving his seat as chair of council to Coun. Harold Usher as the motion was debated. Coun. Nancy Branscombe, leader of a similar motion that died on the council floor on Oct. 30, was absent.

Usher tried to shut down Tuesday's call, ruling it out of order. Coun. Joni Baechler challenged the ruling and council voted 7-6 to move ahead.

Several politicians stressed Fontana's right to be considered innocent until proven guilty, saying the mere suggestion that he step aside violates his Charter rights.

"We've heard a … minefield of problems we have with this motion," Coun. Stephen Orser said, referring to a closed-door meeting earlier in the evening with legal staff. "The way this has been handled reminds me of monkeys learning how to use tools."

Tempers flared when Coun. Dale Henderson described the motion as political manoeuvring by councillors who aren't members of a voting bloc known as the "Fontana 8." The bloc is running the city and getting things done, said Henderson, a member of the group.

There were no big surprises in the voting breakdown.

Councillors Baechler, Bill Armstrong, Matt Brown, Paul Hubert and Judy Bryant supported it.

Sandy White, the only politician who had said she was on the fence, joined Usher, Orser, Henderson, Bud Polhill, Joe Swan, Paul Van Meerbergen and Denise Brown.

Most of those politicians have shown steadfast support for Fontana's decision to lead since the RCMP laid charges on Nov. 20. Fontana is accused of using $1,700 in taxpayers' money to cover a wedding-reception deposit in 2005. He has said he's staying put, and the city needs to move on, Usher said on Tuesday.

"Why don't we just leave it be and get on with the job we were elected to do?"

Other business

- City council voted 14-0 to partner with the YMCA of Western Ontario and buy the former Normal School (165 Elmwood Ave.) from the province. The price tag and plan to pay for an estimated $5 million in renovations will be part of the negotiations.
- The YMCA plans to operate several programs from the facility, including those that cater to youth, and offer space for community use.

Going to the chapel of love?

A slew of celebrities have vowed to tie the knot soon. But will they follow through? PAGE 10

On the up and up

London could be headed for the best hiring period in the past two years PAGE 3

Knights moves

The hottest team in the CHL adjusts to sending three players to the world junior camp PAGE 4

Crease war

Four goalies are vying for a spot at the world juniors PAGE 20

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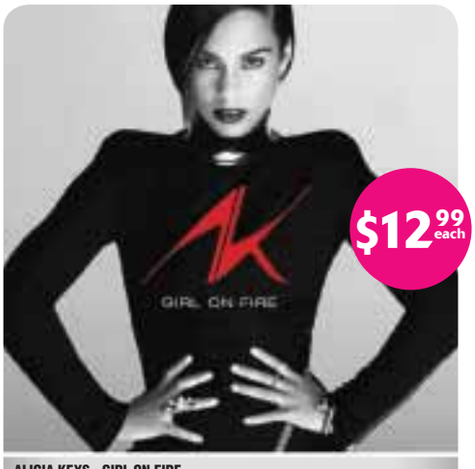

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London ranks among top regions in Ontario employment outlook survey

Indicators. City could be headed for one of the best hiring periods in previous two years

JOHN MATISZ
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The first three months of 2013 will be kind to Canadian job seekers, says a nationwide employment survey.

About 13 per cent of employers involved in a recent study conducted by Manpower Group employment agency say they will be adding workers to their staff in the first quarter of the new year.

The numbers also reveal the feel in London — a community often found near the bottom of the unemployment rate pile — is largely optimistic.

"Things are actually very positive in London," said Michael Johnson, branch manager of Manpower's local office. "In Ontario, based on our first quarter results, the London area is looking to be the second strongest in the province."

The Brampton area is the only region in the province with better statistics.

Johnson says 27 per cent of the London-based employers surveyed indicated they will be looking to hire. This represents an 11 per cent uptick over last quarter's results, giving the upcoming January-February-March period the distinction of being one of the best hiring periods in London over the past two years.

"In talking to my other branch managers, I'm really not surprised what the London results are indicating for the first quarter of next year," Johnson said. "My opinion of the region: We were lagging behind a lot of other regions when it comes to the recovery from the 2008-2009 (recession), and we're starting to finally see some benefit."

All of this enthusiasm should be weighted, Johnson warns, seeing as the area has lost hundreds of manufacturing jobs recently. Instead of rising from the ashes of the recession, the Forest City has been stuck treading water.

"It took us longer to sink," he said. "We didn't get dragged down into the muck as quick, but we stayed down longer."

Johnson says one of the main issues his clients are having a difficult time coming to grips with is the unfortunate decrease in compensation after being laid off and finding new work.

If you were making $25 to $30 an hour before, expect somewhere around $12 to $18 for your new gig, he adds.

Manpower survey

- Data collected from more than 1,900 employers across Canada
- 13 per cent of them say they intend on increasing payrolls in the first quarter of 2013
- 7 per cent say they anticipate cutbacks
- 78 per cent say they will neither increase or cut back
- 2 per cent say they're unsure

Source: Manpower Employment Outlook Survey, released Tuesday

Manpower's London branch manager Michael Johnson, 40, works away inside the company's Richmond Street office on Tuesday afternoon. JOHN MATISZ/METRO

Teachers should leave students out of pay dispute: McGuinty

Students at Sir Frederick Banting Secondary School Monday as they walk out of classes to show support for teachers fighting Bill 115. ANGELA MULLINS/METRO

Teachers should resolve their dispute over pay with the governing Liberals in court, not by depriving students of extracurricular activities, Premier Dalton McGuinty said Tuesday.

Ken Coran, president of the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation has been quoted as saying that he won't rule out withdrawing from voluntary activities for two years — the length of a new collective agreement the province can impose on public school teachers.

McGuinty said he doesn't understand why teachers are involving students in their dispute over money, stopping voluntary activities and staging one-day strikes.

"It's one thing for teachers to withdraw their goodwill from us, but it's another thing to withdraw the goodwill from students," he said.

But he said he won't make extracurricular activities mandatory.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

One-day walkouts

One day walkouts will continue to make their rounds across the province Tuesday. The Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario says every public board in the province will have experienced a one-day strike by Dec. 20. That includes the Thames Valley District School Board.

AM980/AM980.CA

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Court dates. Police crack down on drivers with suspended licences

METRO FILE

The London Police Service announced that they issued 79 summonses to people driving with suspended licences last month.

These illegal drivers are now required to attend court at a later date. Upon conviction, a driver could face a fine in the range of $1,000 to $5,000 for a first offence, and $2,000 to $5,000 for any subsequent offence within the previous five years.

A driver could also face a maximum jail sentence of up to six months. METRO

Students unharmed

School bus in crash in Mitchell

Approximately 25 students were given a bit of a scare following a bus crash in Mitchell.

Perth County OPP say at around 3:15 p.m. Tuesday, an SUV was struck on the side by a sedan on St. George Street. The impact of the crash forced the SUV into the driver's side corner of the school bus.

AM980/AM980.CA

Ticket sales

Jason Bonham's Led Zeppelin is London-bound

Tickets for the critically-acclaimed concert Jason Bonham's Led Zeppelin at Centennial Hall will go on sale Friday.

The Jan. 30 show features iconic Led Zeppelin songs, and video and light effects. For more info, call 519-672-1967 or go to centennialhall.london.ca. METRO

Sticking it to fashion

A Fanshawe College student has earned the right to show off her sticky fashion sense to the world. Krista Smith, pictured above with her winning outfit, took first place in a contest that challenged Fanshawe fashion design students to make a stylish duct-tape outfit for musician My Name is Kay. The contest was sponsored by the Duck brand tape company in partnership with Vervegirl magazine and Fanshawe. Wenhui (Monica) Liu placed second and Sanel Fajkovic came in third. Delaney Bradshaw was recognized for making an outfit that most resembled the original sketch. CONTRIBUTED

Londoner Matt Fuller, new to the London Knights, wrists a shot towards the net during a team practice at Western Fair Sports Centre on Tuesday. JOHN MATISZ/METRO

Local blue-liners called on to step up

London Knights.
Hottest team in the CHL adjusts to loaning three key players to world junior camps

JOHN MATISZ
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The London Knights defence corps just got a lot more local.

Sophomore Brett Welychka and recent pickup Matt Fuller, both Forest City natives, are primed to patrol the Knights blue-line — at least temporarily.

They'll help fill a void left by the departures of Scott Harrington, Olli Maatta, and Nikita Zadorov, who are attending their respective world junior selection camps.

"It's really a thing you don't have a say in, right?" said Welychka, 18. "I think of it as a positive. Any guy would love to be in this position, helping out your team."

London claimed Fuller, 19, off waivers last month from the Sault Ste. Marie Greyhounds. Playing for his hometown team is "almost surreal," says the five-foot-11, 179-pounder, who has suited up once in the green and gold so far.

A few years ago, Fuller was cut from the London Jr. Knights midget AAA squad as a forward, but jumped at the chance of staying on the roster as a defenceman. As fate would have it, he was paired with now-Knights assistant captain Tommy Hughes for the bulk of that season.

On top of loaning a trio to the world juniors, another Knights blue-liner, Kevin Raine, will serve a three-game suspension this weekend for kneeing Trevor Carrick of the Mississauga Steelheads in London's 5-2 win Sunday.

Quoted

"I think, my gut tells, that he probably just got caught up in the moment. At the same time, he has to be held accountable by the league and held accountable to his team."

Knights assistant coach Jeff Paul on Kevin Raine receiving a three-game suspension for a kneeing incident Sunday.

"With Rainer out, that really hurts," assistant coach Jeff Paul said. "But no one's going to start feeling sorry for the London Knights."

That's right, because London has spun together 18 straight wins to tie a franchise record. And now their backs are up against the wall with another three-game weekend approaching.

Only two regulars — Hughes and Miles Liberati — remain from the team's usual six-man defensive unit. Overager Tyler Ferry, a utility man, will slide back to the third spot, while Fuller appears to be the obvious choice to round out the second pairing.

From there, a variety of players are in the mix. Welychka, Paxton Leroux, and Kyle Platzer all worked out as defencemen during practice on Tuesday.

NDP not anxious for 2013 election

The NDP said Tuesday they're not pushing for a 2013 election and are prepared to work with whomever replaces Premier Dalton McGuinty, even though many political observers predict voters will go to the polls early next year.

"I'm not clamouring for an election like other folks," said New Democrat Leader Andrea Horwath.

"What I'm doing is actually taking my time to listen to Ontarians."

Horwath was defending yet another NDP public consultation process while the Liberals are engaged in a high-profile leadership contest and the Progressive Conservatives released a series of policy ideas such as privatizing lotteries, casinos and liquor stores.

"Some people would prefer to be writing their election platforms right now or gearing up for an election, but New Democrats have always been more interested in getting results for people," she said.

Andrea Horwath
METRO FILE

PC Leader Tim Hudak held five news conferences over five days last week to tout his plans to cut the size and cost of government by laying off staff and reducing pension benefits, while the seven Liberal leadership contestants debated policy ideas.

But Horwath isn't worried the two other parties are garnering all the publicity, and said she wants to make the legislature work.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

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Second launch

Defiant N. Korea fires long-range rocket: S. Korea

North Korea reportedly fired a long-range rocket, Wednesday morning, in a defiant move just days ahead of South Korea's presidential election. It was the second rocket launch under leader Kim Jong Un. It was unclear if the rocket launch was a success.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

So the 'R' stands for regret?

Director of Clinical Operations Dr. William Kirby, right, looks over Emily Holmes, who is using a laser to remove Eric Hartsburg's Mitt Romney face tattoo, in Beverly Hills, Calif., Tuesday. Hartsburg, an Indiana-based wrestler and one-time fan of GOP presidential candidate Mitt Romney, tattooed the Romney campaign logo on his face and is now seeking its removal. Hartsburg will undergo about a dozen treatments to remove the stylized Romney "R" tattoo from his face.

NICK UT/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Stolen iPhone's app snaps photo of alleged thief

'IGotYa'. Installed app takes picture of anyone trying to unlock phone and sends info back to owner via email

It's a cool app that may catch a sticky-fingered iPhone thief in Britain.

A woman is wanted for questioning after she unwittingly took a picture of herself with a stolen iPhone. Police in Sussex have released a photo of the woman.

They aren't calling her a culprit yet.

"We don't know that the woman is the person who stole the camera, but she obviously has had some connection with it in the meantime and I'd like to speak to her about it," said Sussex officer Gavin Crute in a news release.

This woman is wanted for questioning in the case of a stolen iPhone in Britain. COURTESY SUSSEX POLICE

The phone had been stolen from the Coalition nightclub in Brighton, East Sussex, earlier this month.

The photo was taken from a different location.

The owner had an app installed that takes a picture of anyone trying to unlock the phone and then sends the information back to them via email.

The app, identified by some media outlets to be IGotYa, is not available from the official Apple store.

The photograph is activated when a wrong password is entered on the keypad.

Crute said that not only does the app photograph someone trying to unlock the phone, but it maps their location.

"We know where and when the photo was taken and it appears to be in a vehicle with quite a large sunroof," Crute said.

Apple has a free app called Find my iPhone, which shows a stolen phone's approximate location. It does not, however, take a picture.

TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

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Facebook. Hunger Games tops pop-culture mentions in 2012

The Hunger Games, the teen survival movie based on the Suzanne Collins book of the same name, tops the list of the most talked about pop culture events by Canadians on Facebook in 2012, the social media network says.

"Most talked about" means mentioned in status updates or posted as a video or story link. The company does not disclose numbers, only rankings.

TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

Top 5 talked about

- **No. 1** Hunger Games film
- **No. 2** The Avengers film
- **No. 3** Television show The Walking Dead
- **No. 4** The Feb. 11 death of Whitney Houston
- **No. 5** Mitt Romney

Canada Post. Holiday rush brings onslaught of mail — and griping

It's supposed to be a time when festive packages are delivered with care and yuletide greeting cards are opened with glee.

But for some Canada Post customers — and the postal employees who have to deal with their complaints — it's not exactly the hap-happiest time of the year.

As the volume of letters and parcels being delivered by the Crown corporation reaches massive levels over the holidays so, too, does the griping.

When Canada Post issued a release on its Facebook page Dec. 3, urging people to check international send-by dates for Christmas packages, there were dozens of not-so-kind responses from people bitterly upset about lost parcels, late deliveries and high postage costs.

Faster technology has made it easier to locate packages, but has also raised people's expectations of how quickly their goods should arrive, said Canada Post spokeswoman Anick Losier. "Our No. 1 call to the customer service is 'Where's my parcel?' — the day before it's due," she said.

"We're now in a world where we're ordering online and the next thing we do is go track our parcel to see where it's at."

"We call it the 'Generation-I-Want-It-Now.'"

THE CANADIAN PRESS

Online health services

WebMD to cut jobs by 14%

Health website operator WebMD says it will cut about 14 per cent of its workforce as part of a push to reduce costs. The New York company says the cuts amount to about 250 positions, will save $45 million US in annual operating expenses. WebMD provides health and benefits information to consumers, employers, doctors and health plans. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Market Minute

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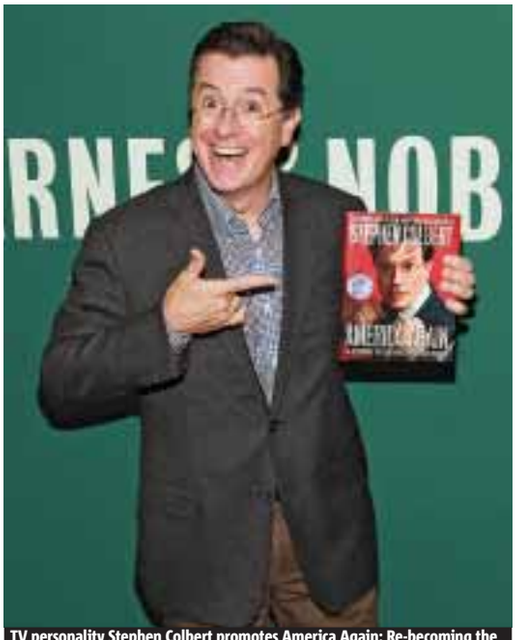
Windsor BIA steps up campaign to woo Colbert



TV personality Stephen Colbert promotes America Again: Re-becoming the Greatness We Never Weren't, in which he refers to Windsor as "the Earth's rectum" in October in New York City. GETTY IMAGES FILE

'Earth's rectum' furor. With new video, locals make last-ditch attempt at convincing comedian to host holiday parade

LUKE SIMCOE
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With less than four days to go until its inaugural Santa Claus parade, the Downtown Windsor Business Improvement Association is hoping a new video will convince Stephen Colbert to play host.

Filmed by Marshall Sfalcin and starring BIA chair Larry Horwitz, the video is the latest missive in a campaign that began last month when Colbert responded on his show to the brouhaha over his referencing of Windsor as "the Earth's rectum" in his new book America Again: Re-becoming the Greatness We Never Weren't. (He told viewers he could have just as easily been talking about Winnipeg.)

Since then, Horwitz has been trying to get the American comedian to cross the border and serve as the grand marshal of the new holiday parade.

Although filmed "entirely in Windsor," the video tells the tale of Horwitz's journey to New York to deliver a box full of Canadian goodies to Colbert. Along the way, he encounters rude baristas and has a run-in with security at Colbert's Comedy Central studios.

The downtown Santa Claus Parade is scheduled for 3 p.m. on Saturday. To date, Colbert has not responded to the BIA's request.

Quoted

"We've been given a clean bill of health."

Larry Horwitz, chair of the Downtown Windsor Business Improvement Association, who claims a 'geoproctologist' has examined WIndsor and found that the city isn't the Earth's rectum after all.

Online

Watch the video at metronews.ca.

Poorest Canadians see few gains in absolute income, report finds

Income inequality in Canada has remained steady since 1998 according to the traditional benchmark, but absolute dollar gains by the country's highest earners have far outstripped the gains by those at the bottom, a report by TD Bank said Tuesday.

Even though the poorest saw a slightly larger percentage gain in income, absolute gains — the amount of dollars in a person's pocket — tell a different story, said TD Bank chief economist Craig Alexander.

After a 20-per cent increase, the after-inflation level of income of those in the bottom 20 per cent increased to only $15,200 in 2010 from $12,700 in 1998.

Meanwhile, at the high end of the income scale, the top 20 per cent have seen an 18-per cent increase in income since 1998, but that translates into $26,700 to bring their income to $171,900.

Quoted

"Although the traditional benchmark of income inequality isn't showing an increase, the absolute levels of income matter enormously."

TD Bank chief economist Craig Alexander

"So part of the issue around income inequality is the fact that households at the low end of the income scale have extremely absolute low levels of income, and that's a major challenge," Alexander said.

And, he points out, those in the middle of the range have seen the slowest pace of increases as the downward pressure on jobs and wages in the manufacturing sector has weighed on growth.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

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CAGE CLOSED ON IKEA MONKEY

JUST SAYIN'
Paul Sullivan
metronews.ca

Is the monkey over yet?

For 15 minutes, the Ikea Monkey was the most famous monkey in the world, the toast of everyone from Warren Kinsella to Anderson Cooper.

There he was last Sunday, larking around a Toronto Ikea parking lot in his cute little shearling coat and diaper, searching for the meatball special, distracting us for one brief monkeyshines moment, from the end of the world (Dec. 21) or the fiscal cliff (Jan. 1). If the Mayans don't get us, the U.S. Congress will.

I mean, come on. How could you resist the combination of a place where you buy rättviken sinks and ektorp sofa beds with a baby monkey named Darwin who brushes his teeth before he goes to bed and wears a Wizard of Oz-winged monkey costume for Halloween?

It was all fun until the authorities stepped in. They confiscated the coat and sent him to Story Book Farm Primate Sanctuary in Sunderland, north of Toronto. Arguably the story gets better. Now, Darwin, stripped of his raiment, has to learn to be a real monkey all over again. He'll have to bond with the other monkeys, and he'll have to do it without his 'nuck-'nuck (baby pacifier).

He's a caged animal

So that's it for Darwin, although he does leave a Twitter account and Facebook page behind, but he'll have to update his status from free-ramblin' to caged.

Darwin's owner is distraught. Darwin is, after all, seven months old, and needs his mommy, even if his mommy has a little trouble telling one primate species from another. Now Darwin has gone to live on the back of some other confused primate. Sanctuary staff are hoping that will be Sweet Pea, a baboon rescued from a roadside zoo.

As you might imagine, Sweet Pea has issues, but she loves to nurture things — kittens, fake fur, naugahyde, so cute little Darwin is just the thing.

The owner is a lawyer and, naturally, she's considering legal action to get her monkey back. When you're a hammer, everything looks like a nail, but she should be careful what she sues for.

Cute little baby rhesus monkeys grow into cute, 50-centimetre-tall adults that carry diseases and fling their feces. She might want to leave Darwin up in Sunderland, cavorting with the lemurs (cue King Julien doing the morning exercise routine: "I like to move it, move it!")

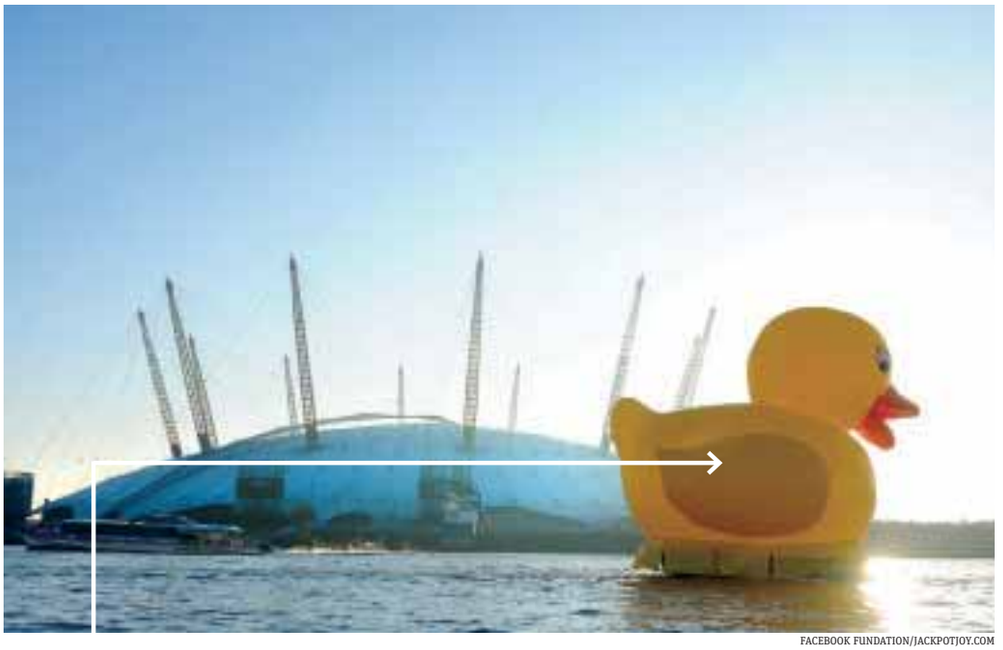
So that's it for Darwin, although he does leave a Twitter account and Facebook page behind, but he'll have to update his status from free-ramblin' to caged.

As for the rest of us, we'll find some other Internet meme to distract us. But it will be a long time before that poignant picture of that little guy wandering around the Ikea parking lot looking for the ball room fades from memory.

A long time. At least another 15 minutes.

Darwin will have to adjust to living like a monkey at Story Book Farm Primate Sanctuary in Sunderland, Ont. NIAMH SCALLAN/TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

Rubber ducky, you're the big one



FACEBOOK FUNDATION/JACKPOTJOY.COM

Duck tales

Massive duck sails through London

Londoners were treated to an unusual spectacle Tuesday as a giant 15-metre rubber duck floated down the River Thames.

The oversized bath toy got special treatment as the iconic Tower Bridge opened to allow it to sail through. The gigantic bird was launched to publicize a £250,000 ($400,000) bursary to encourage Brits to have more fun. METRO

According to research commissioned by the FUNdation, British adults laugh 7.2 times a day on average, but psychologists say we should laugh 15 times a day for optimal health and happiness.
LEWIS WHYLD/PA WIRE/PRESS ASSOCIATION IMAGES

Rubber ducks in the past

Bath toys outline ocean currents

In 1992, a container with 29,000 plastic bath toys fell off a cargo ship in the Pacific Ocean and broke open. The rubber ducks eventually washed up on shores in Japan, Hawaii and North America.

By studying the ocean currents, oceanographer Curtis Ebbesmeyer correctly predicted their trip via the Northwest Passage to Great Britain. METRO

Duck dimensions

- **Weight.** 500 kilograms
- **Size.** 15 metres tall and 18 metres wide
- **Construction.** Made by an eight-person team, who spent more than 800 hours creating patterns, cutting and welding the sections together to produce the air-tight structure before it took to the water

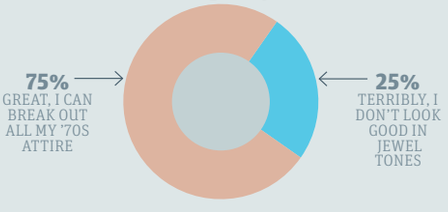
Quoted

"We now want people to send us their own entries of wacky things they'd like to do, and we'll provide funding for the best ones."
Barbara Windsor, actress and patron of Jackpotjoy.com's new Facebook FUNdation bursary

Metropolitan Panel

Register at metropolitanpanel.ca and take the quick poll

Emerald is Pantone's colour of the year for 2013. How does that grab you?



Twitter

@NikkehSass: Why is this newsletter I'm writing more fun than expected? Maybe it's the coffee? Sunshine? Am I a newsletter nerd? #TuesdaySelfDiscovery

@abbey_lawrence: I think they should have a 'Londons Worst Driver'. I tell ya we got some crazy ones. #ldnont

@jaewall: Hahahahhahaha @ trying to find parking in downtown #ldnont at noon on a Tuesday #tistheseason

@CoventMarket: Weather permitting the rink will be OPEN tomorrow:) #ldnont

@lemmesing12: 1 day, 2 examss then FREEDOM!! Letss go 9pm! #geterdone #westernu

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Never too late for a series spinoff

Television. Some of the best shows of our generation could still stand the test of time if they were converted into a new series

MIKE DOJC
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Time has a way of stoking retro fever and nostalgia mining has a deep drill bit. It used to be conventional wisdom that you had a limited window to spinoff a TV show and breathe new life into departing characters before their cache cooled.

Frasier's 11 season run got started the same year Cheers stopped serving drinks and Buffy's vampire boy-toy Angel staked a claim on his own show while the slayer was still only halfway through stabbing Sunnydale's undead population.

The 1990s coming-of-age comedy Boy Meets World has been off the air for a dozen years, but it looks like this TV graveyard corpse is about to get reanimated with original stars Ben Savage and Danielle Fishel on board.

Girl Meets World will revisit Cory and Topanga in the present day where they now have a 13-year-old daughter.

This development leaves us wondering; what other long-ago put-to-pasture series are ready to wake up and smell the future?

Boy Meets World could meet Girl Meets World in a revisiting of the once-popular series. HANDOUT

Steering Urkel back to fame

With Big Bang Theory garnering stratospheric ratings, it's clear there's more room for geeks in primetime. Fashion finally caught up with Steve Urkel's once gauche cardigans and plaid button downs that used to set him apart from the crowd.

The former TGIF mainstay is decidedly hipster in modern times, and adulthood has ironed out his voice's squeakiness so he doesn't even need his nerd-suppressing alter ego Stefan to make the ladies swoon.

The Pilot: Hired as the CEO of Virgin Galactic, Urkel struggles to keep one foot on the ground in Chicago where he and Laura are raising a brood of wily little Urkelos and the other in orbit catering to the whims of wealthy space tourists. Good thing his father-in-law Carl Winslow is still around to steer him in the right direction.

Friend to an Acquaintance

Watching present day Monica, Chandler and company reunite at Central Perk and yuk it up would be interesting television for about five minutes. Rather than dwell on past relationships already fleshed out over the course of 200-plus episodes, Acquaintances breaks new ground by focusing on the still loosely intertwined lives of the core cast of Friends. The hitch is they play caricatures of their slightly past-their-prime real-life selves a la Matt Leblanc on Episodes.

The Pilot: Courtney Cox begs Jennifer Aniston to appear on Cougar Town, which in the show's universe has switched networks once again and is hanging on by a thread. Jen relents, but not before making Courtney alphabetize her stack of Sexiest Woman Alive magazine appearances and polish her Golden Globe.

The XY Files

Flirty David Duchovny is much more palatable than spooky Duchovny. Besides, the Californication star is way more believable unzipping little black dresses and puffing post coitus cigs than chasing little grey men and attempting to see the truth behind smoking man's kabuki theatre.

The Pilot: A mysterious pandemic has winnowed the world's male population down to just 10 per cent, leaving virile men in high demand. Working in conjunction with the Center for Disease Control who discovered the virus was man-made, the FBI responds by opening the XY Files, a new task force intent on apprehending the culprits. Groaning sci-fi fans will be placated by the presence of Gillian Anderson's shrewd disapproving gaze as well as fanboy jaw droppers Katee Sackoff and Summer Glau thrown in for good measure.

Before a prequel was a movie prequel

Hollywood. Filling in the backstory isn't something unique to movies, but it has been fully adopted by today's film industry

IN FOCUS
Richard Crouse
scene@metronews.ca

The Hobbit opens in theatres everywhere this weekend. HANDOUT

It would be tempting to think the words sequel and prequel are the creation of Hollywood marketers looking for new ways to describe old ideas. But the notion of a prequel, a movie that provides the backstory of an existing story, like this weekend's The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey, is not a Tinsel Town contrivance.

The first prequel appeared in the late 7th century BCE. The Cypria, an epic of ancient Greek literature, is the story of the origins of the Trojan War and serves as an introduction to the Iliad even though it was written after the Homer epic was already in print.

The word prequel first appeared in 1958 in an article in The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction but didn't catch on until it was used to describe Butch and Sundance: The Early Days in 1979.

The Star Wars New Hope trilogy are the most famous movie prequels, but Hollywood has been looking back to extend the lives of their franchises for decades.

The 1966 Clint Eastwood spaghetti western The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly, the final film of the Man With No Name trilogy, is a prequel to A Fistful of Dollars and For A Few Dollars More.

It wasn't billed as such, but by the time Eastwood assembles his iconic poncho outfit (which he wore in all three movies without replacement or cleaning) it's obvious we are at the beginning of his journey, not the end.

The title of another movie was more obvious about its origins.

The Texas Chainsaw Massacre: The Beginning is the story of the roots of Leatherface, the human-skin-mask-wearing baddie of the original film. There's all the cannibalism and murder you expect from a Texas Chainsaw movie, but the grisly birth scene kicks it up to another level.

Harry Styles

One Direction isn't too keen on Swift's private jet

Taylor Swift's fledging romance with Harry Styles appears to already be causing strife among his One Direction bandmates.

So what's got them all worked up? Travel arrangements, it turns out.

After the band's stay in New York, Styles reportedly headed back to England with Swift on her private jet while the rest of the band travelled separately, according to E! News.

"The rest of the band were a bit annoyed about the whole thing," a source says. "They took a Virgin commercial flight and there were tons of spare seats on the jet. They were a bit miffed that Harry chose to go with her instead of them. They had just finished a huge concert in New York and all of them were on a high. The fact that he left them to travel solo irritated them a bit."

Pamela Anderson in deep over taxes

Pamela Anderson is in hot water with the IRS. Two tax liens were recently filed against the former Baywatch star totaling more than $370,000, according to TMZ.

The IRS claims Anderson owes just over $250,000, with the rest coming from a filing by the state of California. Still, the total is something of an improvement for Anderson, who was added to California's list of the top 250 debtors in 2010, when she reportedly owed more than $493,000.

Pamela Anderson

METRO DISH

OUR TAKE ON THE WORLD OF CELEBRITIES

The Word

A look back: Celebrity engagements of 2012

THE WORD
Dorothy Robinson
scene@metronews.ca

Despite the fact that every single person in Hollywood gets divorced, these true-believers decided to throw caution to the wind and become betrothed. We look at the big ones:

Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie
The deets: Pitt proposed to Jolie, his longtime girlfriend with whom he has six children, in April with a $500,000,16-carat rock. "It seems to mean more and more to our kids," he says about finally tying the knot, to Us Weekly.
Wedding date: Ha. Like they'd tell us.

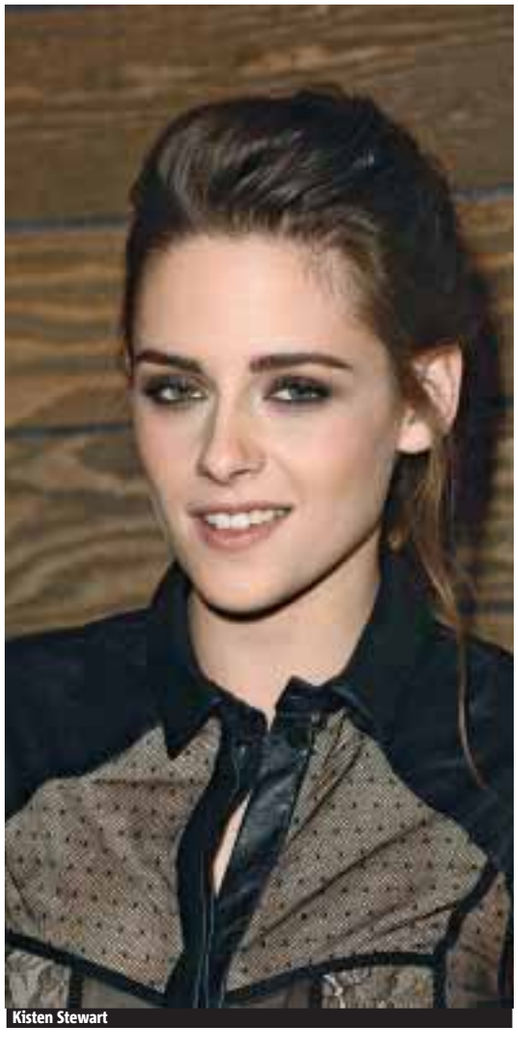
Justin Theroux and Jennifer Aniston
The deets: The two actors, who met on the set of Wanderlust, got engaged in New York City on Aug. 10. Theroux proposed with an eight-carat ring, worth an estimated $500,000.
Wedding date: Again, we'll never know until they sell their photos to the magazine of their choice.

Liam Hemsworth and Miley Cyrus
The deets: They might be young (he's 22, she's 20) but that doesn't mean they won't last forever (actually, yes, yes it does). The Hunger Games actor proposed to Cyrus in May, three years after they started dating, with a 3.5-carat diamond ring.
Wedding date: Eh, you REALLY think this one is going to happen?

Hilaria Thomas and Alec Baldwin
The deets: The two love birds got engaged in April, less than a year after they first met.
Wedding date: It actually already happened (Baldwin moves fast). The two were wed in June in New York City.

Avril Lavigne and Chad Kroeger
The deets: The two got engaged in August, surprising a lot of fans (and gossip columnists) who didn't even know they were dating. "Things just clicked real quick," Kroeger, the lead singer of Nickleback, told a radio station about Lavigne.
Wedding date: I'm kind of getting the vibe they'll skip the wedding and just go straight to procreating Canadian royalty.

Evan Rachel Wood and Jamie Bell
The deets: The two got engaged in January. They met while starring in a Green Day music video; they broke up when she moved on with Marilyn Manson and reconnected when her engagement to the goth rocker ended.
Wedding date: Already happened! They were married on Halloween in California. "It was a small ceremony with close family and friends," said her rep in a statement.


Kisten Stewart

Stewart is cool with getting naked, OK?

Kristen Stewart is sick and tired of all the attention her nude scenes in On the Road are getting. "I do hate also when people go, 'Oh wow, great performance. So brave,'" she tells the Huffington Post. "Because I'm naked? That's annoying. But at the same time, if that's what they're focusing on, then On the Road probably isn't for them anyway." Stewart is a diehard fan of the Jack Kerouac novel on which the film is based, which meant she had no hesitation about doing the more revealing scenes. "This book celebrates being alive and it celebrates being human, and if you want to cover up and deny any aspect of that, you are denying the spirit of the book."

Twitter

@kirstiealley
Dear PA who rang the gate with a script at 3 AM..notice mailbox to the left of driveway...NOTICE the actress with a Glock in upstairs window

@NiallOfficial
Sittin at home! Bored t death!

@Mruff221
I got a text from Joss Whedon the other day. Sounds like he is writing some very interesting stuff for Banner and his alter ego The Hulk.

@AlbertBrooks
By not tweeting I have gained substantially more followers.

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5 spots the Canadian Amazing Race should hit

It's coming to Canada, and it's staying here too. Cheers could be heard in households throughout the country when it was announced that The Amazing Race Canada would follow Canadians traipsing the true north strong and free while competing in challenges. Debuting next summer, producers promise the show will be a love letter to Canada, but haven't revealed which areas of the country will be featured. Here are five worthy location suggestions, along with challenge ideas too.

MAE BOWRING
life@metronews.ca

1 Canoeing the South Nahanni River

SUBARCTIC MIKE/FLICKR

Breathtaking mountain ranges, falls twice the height of Niagara, hot springs and gorgeous flora and fauna can all be viewed along the Nahanni in the North West Territories. Contestants would be challenged with trying to stay afloat through rapids as they navigate the river's four canyons.

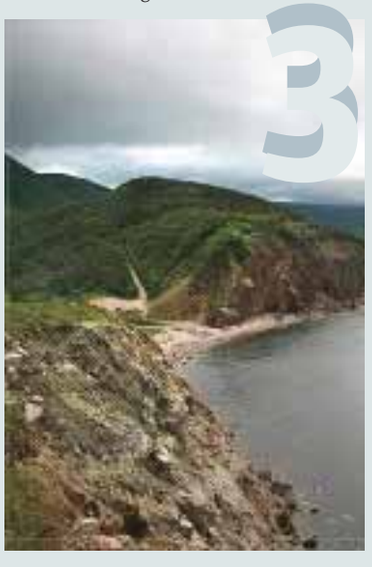
2 Mountain Biking in Whistler

Skiers and snowboarders flock to the snow-capped mountains of British Columbia in the winter months, but during the summer, it's all about biking. With courses that feature sharp turns, rugged terrain and stomach-in-your-throat drops, it's not for the faint of heart, but it's adrenaline-packed fun. This challenge is easy. The team who makes it to the bottom of the course first in one piece wins.

ANDY_C/FLICKR

3 Driving the Cabot Trail

Arguably the country's most scenic drive and popular among domestic and international tourists, the highway features stunning vistas and wildlife as it weaves throughout Eastern Canada. Contestants would have to work a shift at one of the bed and breakfasts along the route, catering to fellow tourists. The team that gets the highest marks for service wins the challenge.



DANI/FLICKR

4 Survivor in the Thousand Islands

HDRAGON/FLICKR

A picturesque destination for vacationers wanting to get away from it all, the thousand islands is known for fishing, water sports and picture-frame worthy sunsets. Contestants would be tasked with navigating small sailboats along the Saint Lawrence River until they find an uninhabited island. Boy Scout skills will come in handy as the first group to start a small fire wins the competition.

5 Scavenger Hunt through Kensington Market

A multicultural and national historic site in Toronto, even the oddest item on a shopping list can be found among the eclectic shops and market merchants. To prove the point, contestants would be given an obscure list of food and clothing items to buy and the first team to get all of them would win.

MARKYEG/FLICKR

A very Colombian Christmas

Although many Canadian families have classic traditions for this time of year, it can be fun to spice things up with recipes from international hot spots.

Known for its historical urban centres, stunning beaches and Spanish nightlife, Colombia also has a lot to offer — even in the kitchen.

The country boasts scrumptious yuletide dishes that even the most amateur chef can prepare to impress guests by turning a typical holiday party into the ultimate fiesta. One of them is this Pork Tenderloin and Uchuva Pesto.

Pork Tenderloin and Uchuva Pesto

Wow your guests with the use of uchuva (gooseberry) in this main dish. PROEXPORT COLOMBIA.

The "cape gooseberry," commonly known in Colombia as uchuva, can be found in local grocery stores.

Ingredients

- 150 g uchuva (cape gooseberry), chopped
- 50 g pistachio, finely chopped
- 15 g cilantro, finely chopped
- 50 g shallot, finely chopped
- 50 ml extra virgin olive oil

For the pork:

- Pork tenderloin, cleaned
- Salt and black pepper
- 30 ml sunflower or grape seed oil
- 60 g butter
- 100 g uchuva, sliced
- 12 g thyme
- 8 garlic cloves
- 12 uchuvas, thinly sliced for garnish

1. Preheat the oven to 400 F (205 C).

2. In bowl, combine the first five ingredients to prepare the uchuva pesto and set aside.

3. Slice the pork tenderloin into 6 portions and season with salt and black pepper.

4. Heat a heavy oven–proof skillet on high heat for 2 minutes and add half of the oil. Sear 3 portions of tenderloin and cook until brown on one side. Turn to sear the other side and add half of the sliced uchuvas, butter, thyme and garlic and allow the butter to melt completely in the pan.

5. Lower the heat to low. Tilting the pan forward, cover the tenderloins with the butter-uchuva mixture for 2 minutes. Place on a plate, clean skillet and repeat cooking procedure for the other portions of meat.

6. Place the first three portions back on the skillet and place in the oven. Cook for approximately 10 to 12 minutes. Remove the skillet from the oven and place the tenderloins on a rack to cool for 10 minutes.

7. Place the pork slices on a serving platter. Cover generously with the uchuva pesto and garnish with thinly sliced uchuva.

PROEXPORT COLOMBIA

This isn't your granny's boring old Fruit Cake

This Exotic Fruit Cake from Colombia isn't your average holiday treat. It will satisfy the harshest fruit cake critic.

Your guests will be pleasantly surprised when they bite into this Exotic Fruit Cake. PROEXPORT COLOMBIA

1. Preheat the oven to 350 F (177 C).

2. In a medium bowl, beat the eggs with the milk.

3. In a stand mixer, mix the flour, sugar, salt and baking powder on low speed.

4. Add the butter to the flour mixture little by little. When the butter is incorporated, add the egg mixture slowly. Stop the machine and scrape down the sides of the bowl. Beat the cake batter on high speed for 2 minutes.

5. Add the exotic dried fruit and stir with a spatula to combine.

6. Place batter in baking molds. For individual portions use muffin tins with paper cupcake liners. A greased bread mold may also be used. When using muffin tins, fill each only half way.

7. Bake the fruit cakes for 20-25 minutes or until a toothpick inserted into the middle of the cakes comes out clean and dry.

8. Let the cakes rest for 10 minutes and then remove them from the mold. Serve warm. PROEXPORT COLOMBIA

Ingredients

- 3 eggs, room temperature
- 45 ml whole milk, room temperature
- 150 g cake flour
- 150 g white sugar
- 1/4 tsp salt
- 1 tsp baking powder
- 185 g butter, room temperature
- 1 1/2 cup exotic dried fruits (gooseberry, dragon fruit, mango, pineapple, guava, etc.)

Colombia's sweet side

metronews.ca

- For delicious Uchuva Angel Food Cup Cakes visit metronews.ca/food

Drink of the Week

Uchuva Cocktail

- 150 grams whole uchuva (cape gooseberries)
- 150 ml water
- 150 g sugar
- 360 ml gin
- 540 ml sparkling wine, cold
- 18 uchuvas, for muddling
- 24 mint leaves, for muddling
- 220 grams of ice
- Mint sprigs, for garnish

To make syrup, combine sugar and water in saucepan and cook over medium heat until sugar completely dissolves.

Cool syrup in freezer. Combine uchuvas and syrup in blender and process on high 1 min. Pass mix through fine mesh strainer and discard solids.

In pitcher, combine 180 ml of uchuva syrup, mint leaves and 18 uchuvas and muddle, 2 mins. Strain syrup and discard mint and uchuva pulp. Add gin and ice to syrup and stir 1 min. to chill; strain out ice.

To serve, add sparkling wine, stir and divide the cocktail into 6 champagne flutes. Decorate each flute with a mint sprig.

PROEXPORT COLOMBIA

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Cranberries and cream cheese unite in Christmas breakfast

If you can make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich and fry an egg, you already have all the skills needed to make this incredible Christmas morning stuffed French toast.

We start with cinnamon swirl bread and make sandwiches using cream cheese spiked with dried cranberries and crystallized ginger. Dunk the sandwiches in eggs blended with cinnamon and a bit more ginger, then toss them in the pan. But don't forget the maple syrup!

Want to get a jump on this the night before? Prepare the sandwiches up to the step of soaking them in the egg mixture. Refrigerate them until morning, then proceed as directed. You'll have delicious French toast on the table in less time than it takes for the kids to empty their stockings.

This recipe serves four. MATTHEW MEAD/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Ingredients

- 4 oz cream cheese, softened
- 1/4 cup chopped dried cranberries
- 2 tbsp finely chopped crystallized ginger
- 1 tbsp honey
- 8 slices cinnamon swirl bread
- 4 eggs
- 2/3 cup fat-free half-and-half
- 1 tsp cinnamon
- 1/2 tsp ground dry ginger
- Butter, as needed
- Maple syrup, to serve

1. In a small bowl, mix together the cream cheese, cranberries, crystallized ginger and honey. Divide this mixture between 4 slices of the cinnamon swirl bread, spreading to just 1/2 inch from the edge. Top with the remaining 4 slices of bread to make 4 sandwiches.

2. In a medium bowl, whisk together the eggs, half-and-half, cinnamon and dry ginger.

3. Dunk each of the sandwiches into the egg mixture to thoroughly coat and soak them.

4. In a large skillet over medium heat, melt just enough butter to coat the pan. Working in batches, fry the sandwiches for 4 minutes per side, or until nicely toasted and heated through. Add butter between batches. Serve warm with maple syrup.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Banana French Toast Bake. Delicious blend

1. Place 4 slices of bread in a single layer in a buttered 23-cm (9-inch) square baking dish. Top with bananas and 4 slices of raisin bread.

2. In a blender or food processor, blend milk, cream cheese, eggs, sugar, flour and vanilla until smooth. Pour over bread. Let stand for 5 minutes or cover and refrigerate overnight.

3. Bake in a 180 C (350 F) oven for 40 to 45 minutes (50 to 55 minutes if it's been refrigerated) until set and top is toasted. Let stand for 10 minutes.

4. Cut french toast into diagonal halves and remove with spatula. Dust servings with powdered sugar, if desired.

THE CANADIAN PRESS/ SUN-MAID

Ingredients

- 8 slices raisin cinnamon bread
- 2 medium bananas cut in 5-mm (1/4-inch) slices
- 250 ml (1 cup) milk
- 125 ml (4 oz) softened cream cheese
- 3 eggs
- 75 ml (1/3 cup) sugar
- 45 ml (3 tbsp) all-purpose flour
- 10 ml (2 tsp) vanilla extract
- Powdered sugar

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Healthy gift you can eat

As far as I'm concerned, the best holiday gift is one that's handmade and edible. And if you can make it in big batches on a budget — and have it be healthy — even better.

The food police love to vilify pancakes as nothing more than carbs and sugar, but these guilty pleasures can be nobler than that. At their base, pancakes depend on a few key ingredients: flour, salt, sugar and leavener. If you swap in whole-wheat flour for at least some of the white flour, add a little flaxseed, slash some of the sugar and top off the finished product with fresh fruit, you're suddenly looking at a very respectable breakfast.

At holiday time, you can measure the batch into pretty containers — old canning jars are perfect for this purpose — attach a nice hand-written label and recipe with a ribbon and consider it done. The deluxe version? Just add a little package of dried fruit or a tiny bottle of maple syrup.

This recipe makes four cups of mix. MATTHEW MEAD/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Pancake Mix

1. Into bowl, sift all of ingredients. Transfer mix to a 1 quart glass bottle or canning jar and screw on the lid. Attach the recipe (below) with a ribbon.

Flaxseed Pancakes

1. In a small saucepan over medium heat, cook the butter until it is light brown in colour and has a nutty aroma.

2. In a medium bowl, whisk the milk and egg. Add the pancake mix, then mix with a spoon, stirring just until the ingredients are combined. Stir in the browned butter.

3. To make pancakes, heat a large nonstick skillet brushed with oil or coated with cooking spray over medium-high heat. Reduce the heat to medium and ladle either 1/4 cup or 1/8 cup portions of the batter into the pan (depending on whether you want large or small pancakes). Let the pancakes cook for 1 to 2 minutes or until small bubbles appear on the surface. Flip, then cook for another 1 to 2 minutes or until golden on the second side.

4. Pancakes can be kept warm in a 200 F oven while remaining batter is cooked.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS/ SARA MOULTON, AUTHOR OF SARA MOULTON'S EVERYDAY FAMILY DINNERS

Ingredients

Flaxseed Pancake Mix
- 2 cups whole-wheat flour
- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- 1 cup flax meal
- 2 tbsp sugar
- 1 tbsp plus 1 tsp baking powder
- 1 tsp table salt

Flaxseed Pancakes
- 2 tbsp unsalted butter
- 1 cup milk
- 1 large egg
- 1 1/2 cups flaxseed pancake and waffle mix
- Freshly cut fruit or berries and pure maple syrup, to serve

A holly, jolly and important opportunity

Seasonal employment. You've got some extra time, so let your many abilities shine

MICHELLE CIRCOSTA
TalentEgg.ca

Give yourself the gift of a glowing CV. ISTOCK

Employers everywhere are preparing for the holiday rush and they need all the help they can get.

As a student, seasonal employment can be a great opportunity to try your hand at a position you may have never otherwise considered. Anaar Merali, division director of permanent placements at staffing firm Robert Half International shared her perspective on the benefits of seasonal employment:

Get the job

To land a seasonal job, it's important that the employer knows you're available immediately and flexible. Make it known that you are open to various types of positions.

"Be open and eager but not desperate," says Merali.

Keep an open mind

Working a seasonal job is the perfect opportunity to try working in a different industry and expand your professional network. Seasonal jobs are a fantastic way to get your foot in the door at a company where openings are less frequent.

For a recent grad in that transitional period, seasonal employment is a way to make some extra income instead of waiting around for permanent employment. And for students, it is an excellent way to make some much needed extra money during the holidays.

At the very least, you will have new and diverse experience to add your resumé. But what's more is these opportunities can often lead to permanent work. According to Merali, this happens quite frequently: "When people do such a good job, they often leave a huge impact."

Make the most of the opportunity

If your aim is to turn a seasonal job into full-time employment, the best thing you can do is leave an impression. Always be very professional and build relationships with everyone — managers, supervisors, the entire staff. Approach all of your tasks as if your decisions will have a long-term impact. Don't get stuck in the mindset that the job is just temporary, otherwise you will ensure that it is. Be committed and engaged.

"Be sure to showcase your skills," says Merali. If you are a seamless fit for the position, the company will have no choice but to keep you around. Demonstrate that you would be an asset to the company as a whole and that your skills are transferable between departments. Look at it and as an extended interview. If you are fortunate enough to have this chance, challenge yourself to think big.

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Reprint that resumé!

Jobs are everywhere

Seasonal opportunities go beyond just retail. There are several firms in the financial sector that will take on extra help during their busy seasons. Accounting firms, for example, will often hire seasonal employees during tax season. If you do your research and ask around, you will find that these jobs are anywhere and everywhere. Take advantage of busy seasons — the end of the quarter or the year means more potential jobs.

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Student voice

All that I've gained from getting involved

Kelsey Goforth
Graduate
Honours Bachelor of Arts in Political Science
University of Toronto
TalentEgg.ca

What's your school-to-work transition story?

While pursuing my undergraduate degree at the University of Toronto, I studied political science with an emphasis on human rights and international development. This past summer I was finishing up my final credit and was searching for the perfect summer job that would hopefully lead me into a career field directly related to these interests.

I was aware that a company called Public Outreach fundraised for developmental and human rights organizations and I had always been intrigued by the fundraisers that I had seen, but didn't picture myself taking on such a role.

However, on the advice of a friend, I applied. The role definitely surprised me. I had no idea how much I would be learning about various not-for-profit charities and how many amazing conversations I would have with donors. One highlight is when I met a woman from Zimbabwe who actually received aid from one of the charities I was fundraising for.

The position turned into far more than a summer job when roles in the recruitment department opened up. I began applying and eventually, in August, I took on the role of U.S. Recruiter, where I was responsible for recruitment in Boston, Chicago, New York City and Minneapolis. I was able to transition quite quickly to my new role, going from fundraiser to recruiter in three short months. Being able to learn about the inner-workings of a whole new department has given me the opportunity to better understand and appreciate all that the company does.

Kelsey Goforth. PROVIDED

What am I doing now?

I am currently in my fourth month as a Public Outreach Recruiter. In addition to my U.S. recruitment duties, I also contribute blog posts to our staff website. Outside of work, I like to pursue other interests that not only appeal to me but also give me an additional skill set to include on resumés and applications. I write articles for TalentEgg and, additionally, I am beginning French courses in January in order to receive a certificate in french proficiency. Although I currently have a job, I do not want to prevent myself from continuing to learn more and develop my skills.

My recommendations for employers, career centres and schools

When it comes to campus career centres and their related programs, it is important to be well-advertised and easily accessible. Students are busy with classes and extra-curriculars, so having flexible hours is imperative. Secondly, many programs at schools aren't given the exposure they deserve. Often students are bombarded with information in their first year, however by the time fourth year rolls around and the job search becomes more intense, these programs are long forgotten about. When students approach their final years of education, universities and colleges should remind them that there is plenty of guidance and resources available.

My advice for students and recent graduates

• Get involved: As a student, it is important to think beyond essays and exams, and also take the time to get involved in your community. I personally found extra-curricular activities and volunteering to be extremely beneficial — both when it came to developing new skills as well as seeking employment.

• The importance of networking: The job market is competitive. Learning to write an impressive resumé is a great skill, however a piece of paper can only go so far. For me, networking has been the most effective means of both connecting with people with similar interests and landing new jobs.

• Don't underestimate your skills: Take a chance when it comes to your job applications. Often students and recent graduates feel either under- or over-qualified for certain positions.

• Don't underestimate the experiences you have: Although you may be a recent graduate, your education, community involvement and past jobs all culminate to make you an excellent applicant. When applying for jobs you feel under-qualified for, keep in mind that the worst that can happen is being rejected.

• Don't overlook great opportunities: If I thought that being one of "those people on the street with the binders" was somehow beneath me, I wouldn't have been given the opportunity to work within the recruitment department. To grow with a company, it is important to start small and work your way up. It is only logical. You must learn the very basics if you want to eventually build on that and take on a more advanced role.

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CONVENIENCE AND VARIETY

GIFT CARDS GIVE RECIPIENTS OPTIONS

Michael Bennett is an occasional gift card giver.

"I sometimes give them as thank you gifts or stocking stuffers," says the Guelph, Ont., man. "They're convenient and easy to give. The downside of them is they're easy to rely on them rather than discovering what someone likes and choosing a gift they would appreciate."

What is it about gift cards that we love so much? Is it the fact that we can buy them virtually anywhere? At a variety of price points in a variety of outlets?

"People generally know what type of store their friends or kids like to shop at," says Frances Ho, founder of Canadian site cardswap.ca. "However, they don't know specifically what sweater they prefer or the right pair of jeans. People are very particular about those things. It's just easier to give a card to a store they know they're going to enjoy."

While Ho believes it's more socially acceptable to give gift cards, she does believe it makes a difference in how you present it as a gift.

'If you combine a gift card with a really nice written message in the card, or wrapping it in a big box, it's really the effort that counts. Then it still has a warmth to it," she says.

They are also a nice way to give something to a gift that's too pricey.

"That's another benefit — if they're saving up for a larger item and the person can't afford to give you the large item, but they can give you a gift card towards," Ho says.

Gift cards do have their drawbacks, of course. Some come with expiry dates for example.

"And a lot of people tend to spend more money when they spend their gift cards because they treat it like it's free cash. And then they end up spending more than they actually budgeted for," Ho says.

However, you can make your gift card dollar stretch by watching for sales or deals — buy a gift card and pick up a gift for yourself for free, for example. Or re-gift a card that's not a fit for you or take it to a site such as cardswap.ca where you can trade your card in for points or cash.

"We see a variety of gift cards come in and whenever we post things on the site, they're gone within 24 hours because someone else wants that card," Ho says.

– Astrid Van Den Broek

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SECRET SANTA GIFT IDEAS

NEWS CANADA PHOTO

It's that time of year — you are buying presents for friends, family, and that one quiet guy at the office. Office gift exchanges often mean you are shopping for people you barely know. To help, the staff from Canada's largest bargain hunting site, RedFlagDeals.com, have put together some secret Santa tips:

BOSS: Buying presents for your boss can be awkward. Choose a meaningful gift instead of something fancy or expensive. Fun gifts like a framed photo from a work event or a batch of gourmet cookies to share are a good start.

NEW PERSON: This one is tougher. Keep an eye on what the new person likes to eat. If they come into the office every day with a large coffee, put together a nice mug, a coffee shop gift certificate and some chocolate-covered espresso beans for the ultimate gift.

INTERN: Usually, "intern" is a code word for "underpaid." Skip the gag gifts and get your intern something useful like movie passes.

RECEPTIONIST: If there is one thing a receptionist has enough of, it's office supplies. Skip the stationery and treat them to a deluxe gift basket, a gift certificate to the local salon for a manicure/pedicure combo, or a good book.

IT/HELP DESK: Treat the people who fix your computer well. Something like a gift certificate to their favourite restaurant will work. If you want to be a bit more creative, observe what they decorate their desk with and get them something that fits in. – *News Canada*

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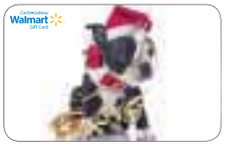
YOUR SIMPLE GIFT SOLUTION

WALMART GIFT CARDS OFFER GREAT PRICES, CHOICES

Wondering what to give the mail carrier, the dog walker, your child's teacher, or the co-worker whose name you picked in the secret Santa draw? Or pretty much anyone on your holiday gift list? Thanks to Walmart, there's a simple solution.

"When you give a Walmart gift card, you're giving the gift of great prices and choices," says Felicia Fefer, Walmart Canada's manager of corporate affairs.

The beauty of giving a Walmart gift card is the person receiving it can choose to use it for whatever they want the most, from fashion and electronics to food and housewares.



There are more than 30 holiday gift card designs, ranging from contemporary (gold, white and purple snowflakes on a purple background) to traditional (holiday bells) and whimsical (cartoon of Santa and friends on a sleigh).

The collection also features cards with specialty finishes, including lenticular cards (where you hold the card still and see one design, then tilt it to view a second design) and scratch 'n' sniff cards (gingerbread is an appropriate scent at this time of year).

There are even cards for pet lovers, with cute images of cats and dogs decked out in holiday accessories.

The gift cards have matching tin carriers that retail for $2.47 each, so no wrapping is necessary. The tins have colourful contemporary Christmas designs that include a red-nosed reindeer pulling a sleigh, Santa with his sack of toys, a pile of gifts under a tree, and blue snowflakes on a white background.

Walmart gift cards can be bought at one store and redeemed at any other store location in Canada. Bonus: When the recipient has spent the amount on the card, it can be reloaded and reused. And the best part? There are no expiry dates.

The holiday-themed cards will be for sale right up until the stores close on Christmas Eve — ideal for last-minute shoppers who still have no idea what to get some of the people on their gift list.

"Walmart gift cards are popular all year long, but especially during the holidays," Fefer says.

"They're the perfect present for those who are hard to shop for or who have everything."

– Jane Doucet

FLEXIBLE PRICING

Located at the cash registers and near the front of the more than 370 Walmart stores across Canada, the gift cards come with a pre-set amount of $25, $50 or $100. Or you can choose the dollar amount — anywhere from $5 to $2,500 — which the cashier will load onto the card.

Battle of the crease: Four goalies fight for junior jobs

World junior selection camp. Canada will take a third goaltender to Russia as insurance against injury

No goalie feels more pressure at the world junior hockey championship than Canada's starter, says the man cultivating the next one.

Ron Tugnutt is the Canadian team's goaltending coach and has personally experienced that kind of pressure. In addition to a long NHL career, Tugnutt twice represented Canada at the men's world championship.

"There's a lot more pressure on our goalie than on the other teams," Tugnutt said Tuesday at selection camp in Calgary.

When European teams win the semifinal, they're thrilled at the prospect of "at least" a silver medal, but Canadian players aren't interested in anything but gold, he explained.

"When we win the semifinal game, we're only thinking one thing," Tugnutt added.

With no incumbent from the previous world junior championship, a major subplot of selection camp in Calgary this week is who will be Canada's starter, backup and alternate at the 2013 world junior championship starting Dec. 26 in Ufa, Russia.

In a new development, Canada will take a third goaltender as insurance against injury because of the travel time required to get to south-central Russia.

Malcolm Subban of the Belleville Bulls, Laurent Brossoit of the Edmonton Oil Kings, Jordan Binnington of the Owen Sound Attack and Jake Paterson of the Saginaw Spirit are the four invitees. There's little time for them to impress head coach Steve Spott as the 23-player team will be finalized Thursday afternoon.

Spott tried to dampen speculation that Subban, the younger brother of Montreal Canadiens defenceman P.K. Subban, has the inside track on the starting job because he plays on European-sized ice at Belleville's Yardman Arena.

After four years on North American ice, the world junior tournament returns to a surface four metres wider with just over a half-metre more space between the back of the net and the end boards.

Tugnutt says Subban's big-ice experience is one check mark in his favour.

"I think it is an advantage for him just because it is a different visual," Tugnutt said. "But that's not going to be the determining factor on what happens here."

THE CANADIAN PRESS

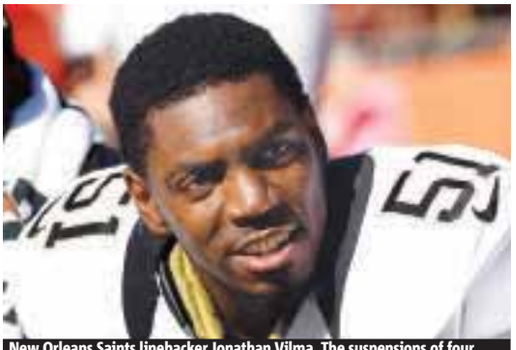
Quoted

"Contrary to belief, there's no starting job being given out, I can tell you guys that."

Canadian juniors head coach Steve Spott on the goalie competition at selection camp.

Goalie Malcolm Subban stretches on Tuesday during the National Junior hockey team selection camp in Calgary.
JEFF MCINTOSH/THE CANADIAN PRESS

Tagliabue overturns 'bounty' suspensions



New Orleans Saints linebacker Jonathan Vilma. The suspensions of four current and former Saints players, including Vilma, have been overturned.
SCOTT ISKOWITZ/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS FILE

In a sharp rebuke to his successor's handling of the NFL's bounty investigation, former Commissioner Paul Tagliabue overturned the suspensions of four current and former New Orleans Saints players in a case that has preoccupied the league for almost a year.

Tagliabue, who was appointed by Commissioner Roger Goodell to handle the appeals, still found that three of the players engaged in conduct detrimental to the league. He said they participated in a performance pool that rewarded key plays — including hard tackles — that could merit fines. But he stressed that the team's coaches were very much involved.

"My affirmation of Commissioner Goodell's findings could certainly justify the issuance of fines. However, this entire case has been contaminated by the coaches and others in the Saints' organization," the ruling said.

Tagliabue oversaw a second round of player appeals in connection with the cash-for-hits program run by former defensive co-ordinator Gregg Williams from 2009 to 2011.

Saints linebacker Jonathan Vilma had been given a full-season suspension, while defensive end Will Smith, Cleveland linebacker Scott Fujita and free agent defensive lineman Anthony Hargrove each received shorter suspensions.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Appeals

- None of the players sat out any games because of suspensions.
- They have been allowed to play while appeals are pending, though Fujita is on injured reserve and Hargrove is not with a team.

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Lockout

NHL, players talks to resume on Wednesday

The NHL and NHL Players' Association will resume their collective bargaining negotiations at an undisclosed location Wednesday — and they'll have some company.

U.S. federal mediators Scot L. Beckenbaugh and John Sweeney are set to rejoin the process.

It will be the first meeting since the two sides took public shots at each other after talks went off the rails last week.

Prior to the blow-up, they appeared to be making progress during three days in New York that saw an exchange of proposals.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

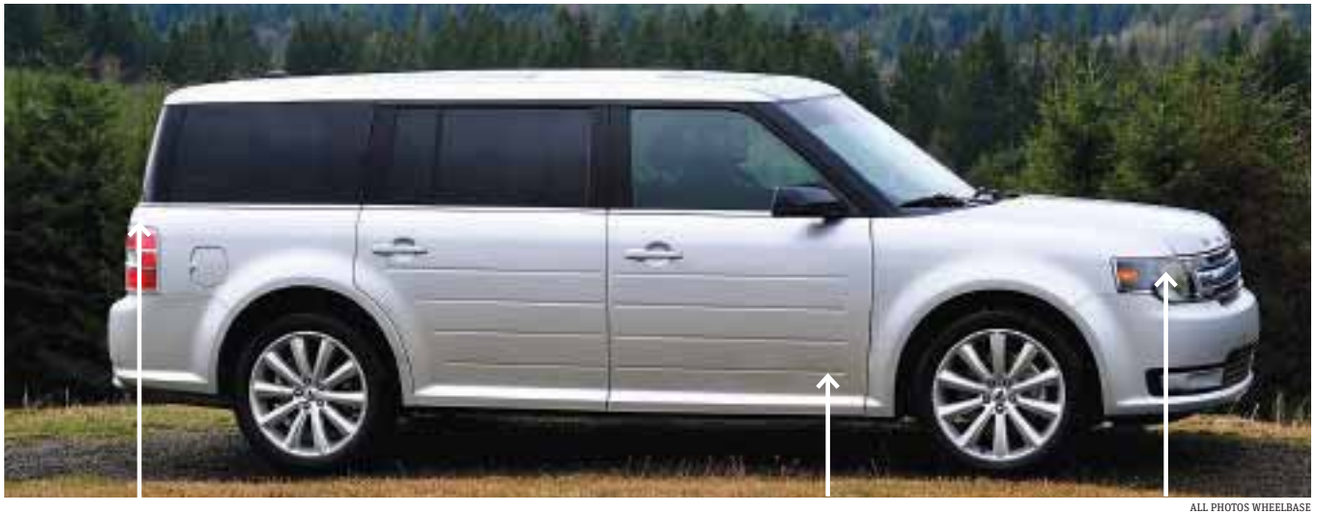
Soccer

Sinclair nabs another award

Canadian soccer star Christine Sinclair added another award to cap a standout season.

The 29-year-old from Burnaby, B.C., was named the Canadian Soccer Association's female player of the year. THE CANADIAN PRESS

Flex your 2013 Ford muscles



ALL PHOTOS WHEELBASE

Space

From front to back, the Flex appears as straight up and down as a shoebox, which is a major contributor to its overall roominess. Although its six, or seven, passenger layout is near tops in this segment, cargo space with the rear seats in place or folded completely flat is about average.

The Flex's dashboard

2013 Ford Flex

- **Type.** Four-door, front/all-wheel-drive, full size wagon.
- **Engines (hp).** 3.5-litre DOHC V6 (287), 3.5 litre DOHC V6, twin-turbocharged (365).
- **Transmission.** Six-speed automatic
- **Base price (incl.destination).** $32,150

Design

The Flex is mostly rectangular and has highly practical styling. Ford's designers made no attempt to disguise the vehicle's significant size, but for the 2013 model year they did devise a far more expressive nose consisting of a single brushed aluminum bar flanked by projector beam-style headlights.

Engine

The standard 3.5-litre V6 now makes 287 horsepower and 254 pound-feet of torque, a gain of 25 horses and six pound-feet from the 2012 engine. Optional is the returning 3.5-litre twin-turbocharged "EcoBoost" V6 rated at 365 (hp) and 350 pound-feet of torque, but only if it's fed premium-grade gasoline.

By comparison

1 Mazda CX-9
Base price: $38,300

2 Chevrolet Traverse
Base price: $37,500

3 Toyota Highlander
Base price: $33,300

Review. If there's one vehicle that lives up to its name, this is it!

MALCOLM GUNN
Wheelbase Media

Say what you will about the Ford Flex, this big-rig takes its people and cargo-carrying role seriously, but with a sly wink and a nod when the topic of styling is mentioned.

Wagon-style bodies are somewhat of a Ford specialty. Along with the Flex, three-row seating is offered in the full-size Expedition and the Explorer, while the Edge, Escape and the passenger version of the Transit Connect cargo van provide space for five.

Among them, however, the Flex is unique. It sits low to the ground like a regular sedan and shares the same platform with the Lincoln MKT wagon. That's preferable for those who want to access their vehicle without using a stepladder.

For 2013, Ford has upgraded the Flex in other ways, including the availability of second-row seatbelts that act a bit like airbags and inflate within 40 milliseconds of a crash. Additional extra-cost safety gear consists of radar-based adaptive cruise control that keeps a steady distance from the vehicle in front, and blind spot information with cross-traffic alert that warns of overtaking vehicles and vehicles approaching from either side when backing out of a parking spot. Then there's curve control that can detect when the Flex is entering a turn too quickly and within a second applies braking force to slow the vehicle down by up to 16 km/h.

The Flex's three-model line up starts with the $32,150 (including destination charges) SE that arrives fairly well equipped with all the usual accessories and gadgets.

The Flex's oversize dimensions and rectangular silhouette might give some buyers pause, but if you're seeking something different, thinking inside the box could make this Ford the perfect fit.

The Flex can seat six or seven people depending on your order.

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Motorcycle show big on the small

Autopilot

AUTO PILOT
Mike Goetz
drive@metronews.ca

I wouldn't say there is anything wrong with an outrageously loud and over-powered Orange County chopper, especially to the weathered face and tattooed biceps of a large person who just got off such a bike in the parking lot. But bigger motorbikes are just not my style.

I love small motorcycles. They're fun to ride and easy to own. And I'm in the styling camp that gravitates to great proportions above all else, so to me, overall size has very little to do with the visual impact and/or appeal of any given bike or car. So I was thrilled to see so many neat and smallish rides on the show floor of last weekend's motorcycle show in Toronto.

This is the show run by the manufacturers, via its Motorcycle and Moped Industry Council (MMIC). After Toronto, the MMIC show makes stops in Calgary, Edmonton, Vancouver, Quebec, Moncton and Montreal. (Check local listings for dates and venues).

At last year's show, for example, you wouldn't have seen the new Suzuki GW250, or Honda's new CB500 line (CB500F, CB500X, CBR500R). Honda suddenly has a very attractive and logical progression of street bikes, in 125-cc, 250-cc and 500-cc formats.

"People want an affordable entry level motorcycle. That's where the market is going right now," said Dave Hawson, director of sales and marketing for Suzuki Canada's motorcycle, ATV and marine division.

Hawson added that a lot of the "affordability" of smaller bikes manifests itself in the insurance end, especially for younger and/or newer riders.

He's dead right. My small phone survey to brokers revealed that an 18-year-old looking to insure a 600-cc sportbike in the GTA would be looking at premiums of about $3,500 to $4,000 and beyond. By contrast, that same 18-year-old rider could insure a 250-cc bike in the GTA for $1,500 to $2,000 — basically half the price.

At the show I ran into Dave Mackenzie of Motorsports Canada, which imports the Wolf Classic 150 — a Honda Rebel knockoff with a 150-cc engine.

He felt that up until a few years ago, the Canadian market was "starved" of small motorcycles. He believed the big brands shied away from them here in North America, because there was simply more money to be found, per unit, in the larger bike formats. I guess it's hard to say whether that was the case, or if it was simply a case of no one wanting to buy the smaller bikes back then.

But there is no denying, however, that the big brands are more aware and concerned than ever that their biggest group of motorcycles buyers — the boomers — are getting older and older and will soon fade from the scene and that they need a new generation of buyers to get into motorcycling culture.Insurance and industry forces aside, I think people have also generally rediscovered the joys of smallish motorcycles, after years of chasing horsepower and their high-speed capabilities.

For those that like the bigger stuff, have no fear. The influx of smaller bikes has not diminished the number of variety of big, powerful bikes, in all their guises. To each their own, I say, even if they are so wrong in their big-bike convictions that they can no longer be saved from them. Even by me.

The hustle and bustle of the show. ALL PHOTOS CONTRIBUTED

This model is part of Honda's new CB500 line.

The Suzuki GW250.

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†Coverage begins from the original new retail sale date and covers 7-years/140,000-kilometres, whichever comes first. ‡0.9% APR only for well qualified buyers; not all buyers will qualify. Amount of down payment and other factors may affect qualification. 0.9% APR available on all models and all qualifying model years (the 5 model years immediately preceding the date of this advertisement, or newer) for up to 24-month terms. Based on a representative example of $15,000 financed at 0.9% over 24 months equals monthly payments of $630.88 with $0 down payment, cost of borrowing is $141.03 with a total obligation of $15,141.03. Licence, insurance, taxes, down payment, and, where applicable, PPSA and other dealer charges are extra and may be required at time of purchase. Finance on approved credit for qualified customers only. Offer subject to change without notice. Visit your participating dealer for complete details.

Horoscopes

♈ Aries
March 21 - April 20
Don't take sides or play favourites today. In fact, steer clear of contentious issues altogether if you can. No matter how hard you try to be fair, you will make more enemies than friends.

♉ Taurus
April 21 - May 21
You are being too serious about something that is of no importance in the greater scheme of things. Focus on what makes you feel good, what makes you laugh, what makes you glad to be alive. Nothing else matters.

♊ Gemini
May 22 - June 21
It may seem as if someone you live or work with is trying to undermine your efforts, but in reality you are reading too much into a situation that is quite straightforward. Don't listen to what they say — watch what they do.

♋ Cancer
June 22 - July 23
No matter how annoying certain people get today, you must not allow yourself to be provoked. You may be raging on the inside but if you stay calm on the outside it will defuse what could have been a messy situation.

♌ Leo
July 24 - Aug. 23
A sudden attraction is likely today but it may be more than just romantic. Most likely you will meet someone whose mind is a match for your own, and whose sense of humour has you laughing fit to bust.

♍ Virgo
Aug. 24 - Sept. 23
You need to do some serious thinking about a relationship that has brought you a lot of pleasure but also a considerable amount of pain. Is it worth carrying on with? Only you can decide. Make your choice.

♎ Libra
Sept. 24 - Oct. 23
You need to slow down and catch your breath today because what happens over the following three or four days will be both exciting and exhausting. Give your body, your mind and your emotions a rest — they've earned it.

♏ Scorpio
Oct. 2 04 - Nov. 22
If you uncover some juicy information about a friend, you should keep it to yourself. It will save them from embarrassment — and give you a bargaining chip you may one day be able to use.

♐ Sagittarius
Nov. 23 - Dec. 21
Some people are feeling rather resentful towards you. Why? Because everything you touch turns to gold. It's not your fault you are smack bang in the middle of such a fortunate phase, so don't feel guilty about it.

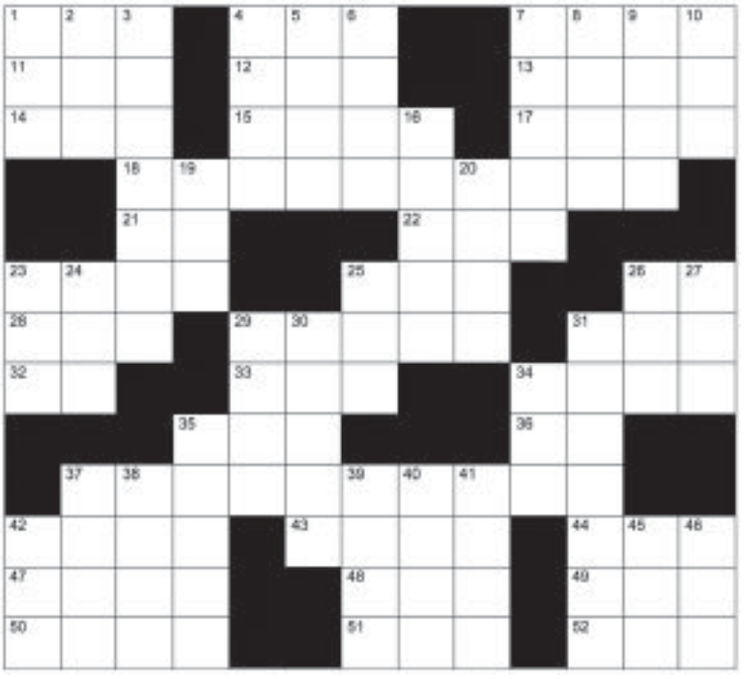
♑ Capricorn
Dec. 22 - Jan. 20
The planets warn that although it's right to feel pleased with what you have achieved, it would be wrong to believe it's all plain sailing from now on. A new challenge is heading your way. Be ready for it.

♒ Aquarius
Jan. 21 - Feb. 19
Stop thinking about what has gone wrong and focus on the many things that are still going right for you. There is no reason at all why you should be in a downbeat mood. Life is good and getting better.

♓ Pisces
Feb. 20 - March 20
A friend in need may be the last thing you want to deal with right now but you are not the sort to turn them away. Do what you can to soothe their fears and ease their pain. You'll benefit too, in unexpected ways. SALLY BROMPTON

Crossword

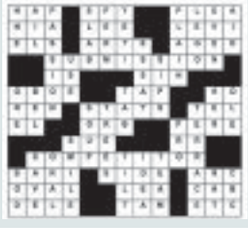
BY BETTY MARTIN



Across
1. Apple product
4. Golfer's goal
7. Reunion attendee
11. Stop – - dime (2 words)
12. Before, or yore
13. Singer/actress Falana
14. Ruin
15. Make over
17. Fashion magazine
18. Star of Touched by an Angel (2 words)
21. – the Heat of the Night
22. Buddhist sect
23. Fuss
25. Gamble
26. "How to Marry a Millionaire" actress (init.)
28. "Con —"
29. Wedge
31. Bikini half
32. Courtroom figure (abbr.)
33. Snakelike fish
34. My Name is —
35. Syrup source
36. Minneapolis state.
37. Wee Irish fairy
42. Actress Ramirez of Grey's Anatomy
43. "— on Me"
44. La Rue of CSI: Miami
47. Related
48. Do away with
49. — Tin Tin
50. Jeans go-with
51. Pauses
52. Unhappy

Down
1. We celebrate her in May
2. Actress Ortiz of Ugly Betty
3. Transporter
4. Hairdo
5. Space
6. Comedian Foxx
7. Actress Close
8. Function
9. — McBeal
10. Daniel — Kim of Hawaii Five-O
16. Seeps
19. Toronto's prov.
20. Dampens
23. Passing fancy
24. Inlet
25. Sound measure
26. Sub zero comment
27. Guy's date
29. Juicy fruit
30. Ward off
31. Pennants
34. Aussie bird
35. Reaches
37. Pond
38. Canal of song
39. Bird-bill part
40. Broadway musical
41. No ifs, — or buts
42. Was in session
45. By way of
46. The Bold – the Beautiful

Yesterday's Crossword



What's online

See today's answers metronews.ca/answers.

Sudoku

How to play
Fill in the grid, so that every row, every column and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1-9. There is no math involved. You solve the puzzle with reasoning and logic.

5						3		9
		1	3		2			
2					7			
		2					6	
	5	6	4	8	9	7	1	
	7					4		
			2					1
			7		8	6		
1		4						3

Yesterday's Sudoku

8	1	4	6	5	9	2	7	3
5	7	2	8	4	3	9	6	1
9	3	6	1	2	7	8	5	4
4	6	8	9	7	1	5	3	2
3	2	1	5	8	6	4	9	7
7	5	9	4	3	2	1	8	6
1	8	5	3	6	4	7	2	9
6	9	7	2	1	5	3	4	8
2	4	3	7	9	8	6	1	5

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